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Botanist Speaks On Pollution At Columbia Falls

COLUMBIA FALLS — Dr. Clarence Gordon, a University of Montana botanist, said Tuesday night the solution to air pollution problems lies in the courts.

Referring to flouride pollution from the Anaconda Aluminum Company's Columbia Falls plant, Gordon told the gathering of 250 he doubts they (AAC) deny there is a problem. "The question is, how serious is the problem?"

Recently, charges that flouride pollution is damaging plant life and wildlife in Glacier National Park were leveled against the firm. For some time now, Columbia Falls area residents have been complaining about the effects of flouride pollution on their shrubs and gardens.

"You can't wait around for federal and state governments to come up with solutions to the problem," he said. "You have a right to demand clean air," he said. "That's where the courts come in. But you have to be concerned enough about wanting to do something about the environment before anything will be done."

For some time now, Gordon has lectured on the premise legal action is the best recourse against companies that pollute

the air. Hence, his remarks came as no surprise.

What was surprising was the interest in the problem. Past air pollution sessions in the Flathead have attracted much smaller followings. Those who attended Gordon's lecture listened intently while he discussed the problem. His remarks were pointed but Anaconda officials who attended made no move to answer his charges.

"The Anaconda Co. can deny pollution is affecting Glacier National Park but chemical tests show different," he charged.

He explained plant and animal life can be tested to determine the cause of disease and death. "Flouride is far ahead of whatever is in second place," he said.

Gordon said that while most pine trees keep their needles for several years, those in the Columbia Falls area have only two years growth.

Deer, he continued, have been tested to show 280 parts per million flouride compared to a tolerable 60 ppm.

Gordon charged AAC is making millions of dollars off Montana's natural resources without spending any money in the state.

Instead, he said, they have a curious way of solving the problem. "They simply buy up the valley and the persons living there live in slavery."

Although Anaconda officials made no move to answer Gordon's charges, the Columbia Falls plant's public relations officer Jack Canavan said today his company will not remain silent.

He reported Anaconda officials have been invited to participate in an air pollution week program planned by the Columbia Falls Jaycees early in February.

"We will present our official position during the Jaycee program," he said. "We are not oblivious to the problem. The fact of the matter is the Anaconda Company is quite concerned about pollution in Montana."

He reported the company is working closely with Ben Wako, director of the state's Division

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